GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING FY 2007
NATIONAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE (NRI) APPLICATIONS

Program Information: Learn more about available or anticipated CSREES competitive grant programs at **http://www.csrees.usda.gov**. Select "*Funding Opportunities*" to find links to full announcements of various programs, including the current NRI Request for Applications.

Conflict of Interest: You must disqualify yourself as a reviewer of an application if you have had one of the following relationships with the Project Director (PD) or other key personnel listed in the application: Have ever been a thesis or postdoctoral advisee/advisor; Have been a co-author on a publication within the past 3 years, including pending publications and submissions; Have been a collaborator on a project within the past 3 years, including current and planned collaborations; For someone in your field, have had a consulting/financial arrangement or other conflict-of-interest in the past 3 years, including receiving compensation of any type (e.g., money, goods or services); Are from the same institution, had previous employment with the institution within the past 12 months, or are being considered for employment at the institution; Have a known family relationship such as a spouse, child, sibling, or parent, or other relationship, such as a close personal friendship, that you think might tend to affect your judgment or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship. If you encounter a situation about which you are uncertain, please bring it to the attention of the CSREES National Program Leader for a decision

Confidentiality: The Department of Agriculture receives research applications in confidence and is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of their submission and contents. For this reason, confidentiality must be maintained--**therefore please DO NOT copy, quote, or otherwise use material from this application**. If you believe that a colleague can make a substantial contribution to the review, consult with the CSREES National Program Leader before disclosing either the contents of the application or the applicant's name. When you complete the review, please destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the application and maintain its confidentiality. **If you are unable to review, please contact the respective CSREES National Program Leader, destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the application and maintain its confidentiality**.

Application Page Limit: For Research Career Enhancement Awards (Sabbatical Awards), Equipment Grants, and Seed Grants, the Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 7 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables. For all other types of applications, the Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 18 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables. These page limitations apply regardless of whether figures or tables are included. Additions to the Project Description (Appendices) are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed research and are strictly limited to a total of two. This total may include reprints and/or preprints. Reviewers are advised that, should these limits be exceeded, only text within the requirements need be read.

Evaluation Criteria: Your review comments will be a critical component of the panel's evaluation and ranking of this application. The review panel will consider the details of all comments received for each application. All reviews must be submitted electronically through the Peer Review System, which can be accessed through the following web site: **http://prs.csrees.usda.gov/login.jsp**, and more information is provided in the cover letter or instructions sent with the application(s). The evaluation criteria are listed below for various types of applications.

Applications for Research, Including Standard Research, Strengthening Standard Research, Postdoctoral Fellowship, and New Investigator

1. Scientific merit of the application for research.

(a) Novelty, innovation, uniqueness, and originality;

(b) Where model systems are used, ability to transfer knowledge gained from these systems to organisms of importance to U.S. agriculture;

(c) Conceptual adequacy of the research, as applicable;

(d) Clarity and delineation of objectives;

(e) Adequacy of the description of the undertaking and suitability and feasibility of methodology;

(f) Demonstration of feasibility through preliminary data and/or, for postdoctoral fellowships, publication record of the mentor; and

(g) Probability of success of project.

2. Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management

(a) Qualifications of applicant (individual or team) to conduct the proposed project, including performance record and potential for future accomplishments (for Postdoctoral Fellowship applications, this applies to the mentor as well as to the postdoctoral applicant);

(b) Demonstrated awareness of previous and alternative approaches to the problem identified in the application;

(c) Institutional experience and competence in subject area; and

(d) Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation.

(e) Planning and administration of the proposed project, including: time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; and planned administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, collaborative efforts, and the planned dissemination of information for multi-institutional projects over the duration of the project.

3. Project Relevance

(a) Documentation that the research is directed toward specific priority areas identified for the program in the current NRI Request for Applications. These priorities are designed to yield improvements in and sustainability of U.S. agriculture, the environment, and rural communities.

Application for a Postdoctoral Fellowship will also be evaluated on the quality of the training environment, including:

(a) Documentation that arrangements have been made with an established investigator to serve as mentor;

(b) Documentation that arrangements have been made for the necessary facilities, space, and materials to conduct the proposed research; and

(c) Potential for the postdoctoral fellow to initiate an independent research program.

Conference Applications

1. Relevance of the proposed conference to agriculture and food systems in the U.S. and appropriateness of the conference in fostering scientific exchange;

2. Qualifications of organizing committee and appropriateness of invited speakers to topic areas being covered;

3. Uniqueness and timeliness of the conference; and

4. Appropriateness of budget request.

Applications for Research Career Enhancement Awards, Equipment Grants, and Seed Grants

1. The merit of the proposed activities or research equipment as a means of enhancing the research capabilities and competitiveness of the applicant and/or institution;

2. The applicant's previous research experience and background;

3. The appropriateness of the proposed activities or research equipment for the goals proposed; and

4. Relevance of the project to long-range improvements in and sustainability of U.S. agriculture, the environment, and rural communities.

Applications for Integrated Projects

These evaluation criteria should be used for the review of all integrated research, education, and extension applications.

1. Merit of the Application for Science Research, Education, and/or Extension

(a) Project objectives and outcomes are clearly described, adequate, and appropriate. All project functions (i.e. research, education, extension; at least two functions are required) are reflected in one or more project objectives;

(b) Proposed approach, procedures, or methodologies are innovative, original, clearly described, suitable, and feasible;

(c) Expected results or outcomes are clearly stated, measurable, and achievable within the allotted time frame;

(d) Proposed research should fill knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of practices and programs to address the stated problem or issue

(e) Proposed extension should lead to measurable behavior change or adoption of technology in an identified audience or stakeholder group.

(f) Proposed education should have an impact upon and advance the quality of food and agricultural sciences by strengthening institutional capacities and curricula to meet clearly delineated needs and train the next generation of scientists and educators.

2. Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management

(a) Roles of key personnel are clearly defined;

(b) Key personnel have sufficient expertise to complete the proposed project, and where appropriate, partnerships with other disciplines (e.g., social science or economics) and institutions are established;

(c) Evidence of institutional capacity and competence in the proposed area of work is provided;

(d) Support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation are sufficient;

(e) A clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, maintenance of partnerships and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the project team.

3. Project Relevance

(a) The project addresses a stated program priority. Functions (research, education, and/or extension) are integrated and necessary to address the problem or issue.

(b) The proposed work addresses identified stakeholder needs;

(c) Stakeholders (representatives of target audiences) play an active role in setting project direction, evaluating the relevancy of project outcomes, and assisting in communication with the target audience;

(d) Plan and methods for evaluating success of project activities and documenting potential impact against measurable short and mid-term outcomes are suitable and feasible;

(e) For extension or education activities, curricula and related products will sustain education/extension functions beyond the life of the project;

(f) For extension or education activities, the resulting curricula or products share information and recommendations based on knowledge and conclusions from a broad range of research initiatives.